

Garbage Gazette

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Connecticut DEP Recognizes Ten Towns for their Outstanding Recycling Programs



As part of our 2002 celebration of America Recycles Day, the Connecticut DEP invited towns to self-nominate their recycling programs to receive an award for outstanding accomplishments in the area of recycling, reducing waste, composting and procurement of recycled products. DEP selected ten towns from those entries. The towns chosen are listed below, along with a brief overview of some of their programs. These towns received an award, presented by Assistant Commissioner Jane Stahl, at a ceremony held at DEP in December. We encourage other towns to use these towns as role models as they work to improve their own programs. The winners include:

Cornwall- Cornwall has a recycling rate of 32%, well above the state average recycling rate. They have a program to offer compost bins to residents at cost. They also have some interesting reuse programs that they operate with the assistance of local non-profit groups. They collect polystyrene packing peanuts for redistribution to retail outlets for reuse, old eyeglasses are collected for reuse and bicycles are salvaged for the explorer scouts who distribute them to the needy.

Manchester- Manchester implemented recycling long before it became mandatory in Connecticut. Drop-off facilities for paper and glass were offered at the town's landfill back in the late 1970s. Their recycling rate, at well over 40%, is one of the state's highest. Once the program became mandatory, Manchester implemented a penalty structure that doubled tipping fees (after one warning) for trash loads that came in contaminated with recyclables. Over time many additional items were added to curbside collection including plastics, used motor oil and clothing.

Mansfield- This town collects a wide array of non-mandated items (some curbside, most at the tranfer station) including aerosol & paint cans, televisions and computers, fluorescent bulbs, batteries, antifreeze, brake fluid and polystrene peanuts. In addition, reusable small household items, toys and books can be brought to the town swap shop. Residents are charged for their trash collection though a pay-as-you-throw system that means that those residents who generate more trash pay more for trash disposal. Mansfield is especially notable for the recycling programs in their schools. Three Mansfield schools have gotten the Green school award from the Connecticut recyclers coalition. Just this year the Middle School participated in producing a composting manual for schools, which used their own experience as an example, which was distributed on CD to all schools in Conn. and can be downloaded from the DEP website.

Middletown- The town works closely with businesses to ensure compliance. They issue newsletters and other mailing and even provide free indoor and outdoor bins to businesses that recycle mixed paper. The town follows up on complaints with site visits. The city can impose fines and has fined a local hauler for non-compliance. The City has well-developed outreach program for residents which includes mailings, bill inserts,

newspaper ads, a regular newspaper column written by the Recycling Coordinator, flyers and a variety of special events. These have included recycling displays at the library, events at the recycling center and last year a "Rewards for Recycling" event was held in which 500 bags of recycled promotional prizes were given to residents who are doing a great job recycling. The City has organized a number of reduced price composting bin distributions over the years which have included educational workshops for residents. Also of note is a large-scale vermicomposting project that is due to begin operation later this year.

New Britain - New Britain has a unique program that creatively utilizes other town Departments to do recycling inspections for businesses. They utilize the Health Department inspection process to inspect restaurants for recycling compliance and waste audits are provided by a non-profit organization-the Connecticut Business Environmental Council (CBEC). They have a budget of \$20,000 dedicated to recycling education which is used to produced brochures, T.V. spots, ads, targeted mailings, etc. Materials are produced in a multi-lingual format to meet the needs of the diverse population of New Britain.

Norwalk- Norwalk, with over 83,000 residents, is the largest city that was recognized. They have an exceptionally high recycling rate at over 35%. The city's program includes commercial pick up of corrugated cardboard, mixed paper and newspapers. Very few municipalities provide this valuable service to local businesses, which, especially for the smaller businesses, have difficulty finding reasonably priced recycling services for paper. Norwalk also provides curbside pick up of yard wastes from April through December and collects antifreeze from residents, in addition to batteries and waste oil.

Portland- Portland collects many additional, non-mandated items at their transfer station including plastics #1 & #2, polystyrene packaging and clothing. Their white office paper program is especially noteworthy. They allow small businesses and private residents, including people from other communities to drop off high-grade white office paper and cardboard. Over 15 tons a year of white office is generated through this program. As an added incentive to participate they give a free ream of new recycled content paper to participants.

Redding- Redding has an exceptionally well-run transfer station that is a model for other towns. They collect many items not required by state law including plastics 1-7, phone directories, clothes and shoes, floourescent bulbs, magazines and junk mail. They take separation a step further than most communities such as keeping the different colors of glass separate and baling all their own cardboard. This results in a higher pay back to the town for higher quality materials and can reduce the amount of residue produced due to contamination.

Somers- Somers purchases paper products for its school and town offices through a regional cooperative program and requests that these items all have recycled content. They have a "Blue Light Building" which is a discarded temporary classroom. Through this program they provide a reuse opportunity for still usable toys, furniture, appliances, dishes and books. Residents are able to pick up free wood chips made from the grinding of brush and logs. Transfer station operators check incoming loads. If materials are not properly separated they are rejected. The town has a local ordinance that requires haulers to report the ultimate destination of collected trash and recyclables to the town.

Stonington- Stonington utilizes a unit pricing system for it's residential and commercial trash/recycling collection program. For private residences recycling is free but there is per bag fee for trash. This provides a financial incentive to recycle and reduce waste. The commercial program allows all businesses an opportunity to recycle all of the mandated items, usually at a lesser rate than for MSW removal. The town recycles many non-mandated items such as plastic #1& #2, polycoated drink containers, junk mail, cereal/cookie boxes and old clothes. Reuse options are also an important part of Stonington's program which includes a reuse shed at the transfer station for book, toys and household items and the town has produced a "Use It Again Stonington" booklet to promote the reuse and repair of various items.